

Risking it All

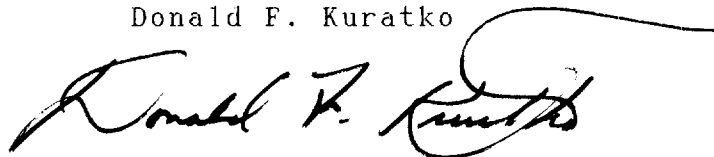
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Thesis Advisor

Donald F. Kuratko

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald F. Kuratko", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

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Honors Thesis 499

Journal

Michele G. Marshall

Started January 24, 1991

January 24, 1991

10:37 pm.

It seems that being in the right place at the right time asking the right questions can lead to the most interesting experiences in one's life. For example, this project.

I went to see my advisor, Dr. Kuratko, last semester to discuss with him what I might be able to do for my Honors College Thesis. I had considered various ideas during my junior year as to what I might choose for a thesis project. I had made a decision at the beginning of my senior year, but facing the most difficult semester of my college career as an entrepreneurship student, I realized that my previously chosen topic was too involved for serious consideration at this point. Thus, as a supplicant, I sat in front of Dr. K. to discuss my options.

Not 15 minutes earlier, Dr. K., the director of the entrepreneurship/small business management program, had been talking to Dr. Misiewicz, the director of the telecommunications department, about a video project. Dr. K. works outside of the classroom as a management consultant. He regularly gives a slide presentation on Ball State and the entrepreneurship program to each company he consults with, since they're a captive audience anyway. Now

he was being given the opportunity to have a video created about Ball State and his program. The problem for Dr. K. was trying to find time to direct this video as the t-comm department knows very little about the entrepreneurship department to make the video on their own.

Thus 15 minutes after this little tete-a-tete, I walked in, looking for a thesis. Dr. K suggests, with enough hesitation to make me interested, that I *might* be interested in this "little" project he had just had proposed to him. I took the bait and was given the task of filtering the information that Dr. K wants in the video, to the t-comm crew I would be working with. At that time the project was to be done in conjunction with a senior t-comm production class and a t-comm journalism class, but more on this later. I would also be given some license on where and what would be filmed.

So I returned from break and headed to the professor in the t-comm building I had been told I would work with. Dr. Richardson was very kind, giving me lots of interesting hints and terrific advice. He could answer all of my questions, except one: What time does the class meet that I'll be working with?

It turns out that the production class I had been told I would work with had been rescheduled for next fall. There was no class.

Immediately I made an appointment with the director of the t-comm department, Dr. Misciewicz (Dr. Joe), who had

sent me to Dr. Richardson in the first place. Dr. Joe has a wonderful sense of humor and seemed the least unperturbed that I was having visions of my honors thesis, and degree, riding off into the sunset without me. He gave me two plans of action: see about working with Alpha Epsilon Rho, the t-comm honor society; or try to coordinate three different professors and classes into a team to help me. I immediately went for plan A, and contacted the president of AER, Brian Woodrum (Woody).

I have to admit, my confidence in this whole thing was pretty shaken by then. I don't have problems working with other students, but experience has shown me that other people are not always as anxious as I am to get things done when it's not their project. But I called Woody with an open mind, and was pleasantly surprised. Not only did he have a copy of a t-comm department video that he and some of his group had done, but could I find time to come see it tomorrow?

The video was incredible.

I was thrilled to be working with a small group of people. The thought of having only one professor to report to, and that one being Dr. K, was the icing on the proverbial cake. I knew I was working with people who really wanted to prove themselves and do a good job. The project was ready to begin.

January 25, 1991

11:46 am

Yesterday we had our first shoot with one of the grads from the entrepreneurship program, Mary Schroeder. She had come to talk to the new venture creation class and to give us a presentation on marketing for our business plans. Dr. K hadn't mentioned anything to her prior to her coming to BSU about being videotaped. But she was very willing and was an excellent guinea pig.

I wasn't too sure what any of our tapings would be like, and I honestly didn't know anything about working with Woody, except that I had a bit of confidence in him. We were a little bit late for our studio time as Mary stayed after to answer some questions for individual class mates.

When we got to the studio, I found out that Woody would be doing all of the taping himself. So Mary and I had some time to sit and talk about each other, her job as SBDC director in Columbus, IN, and about my business plan. It was really quite beneficial to both of us to sit in the studio and talk for awhile and to get used to the surroundings. It also helped Woody set up since we sat in our positions doing exactly what we would do in taping, talk.

The scene was set with Mary sitting at a slight angle with her head turned facing me. I was in a chair away from both her and the cameras. It was planned that what we would use from this shoot of the tape was footage of Mary in close-up talking about the entrepreneurship program and Ball State. I wouldn't be in this filming at all. And to my surprise and joy I got to wear one of those headsets with one earphone and a mic, so that I could hear Woody in the sound booth.

Mary was terrific. I couldn't have written a script for her to read that would have said anything better than what she said off the cuff. This style wouldn't have worked for just anyone, I don't think. But Mary's job entails her spending quite a bit of time talking to new business owners and entrepreneurs and explaining things to these people. She's a natural at thinking quick on her feet and explaining things. She was dressed for the presentation that she gave to the class, which was a red suit coat dress, so there was plenty of contrast between her and the grey curtain backdrop we used as a set. The actual taping was not the first time that Mary had encountered the questions that I had prepared for her. I read over them once with her so that she could be thinking about them. But I expressly didn't want her to give me an answer in advance for two reasons. First, if she was the least bit nervous and while we were talking she gave me an answer that she liked, she might have struggled during the taping to remember what she had wanted to say.

Secondly, I would be sitting off of the set to give her questions and she would be looking at me during her entire answers. If I had heard her response before taping, I might not have paid as much attention to her response as I could have. Then I might have done something to distract her, make her laugh, or feel nervous or uncomfortable.

I asked her the following questions, with which we got around 10 minutes of video:

1. How has what you learned through the entrepreneurship program helped you in your present position?

2. How has having the specialized degree in entrepreneurship helped you and why?

3. What part of the program has helped you the most and why?

4. Has having to present a business plan helped you and does it still help you today?

5. Explain your continued dedication and help with the program. You return to give seminars to those in the program. Why?

6. One of the working titles for this video is "Risking It All." How do feel about that?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

It may seem that the first questions were asking the same thing. But when you rephrase a question and ask it again, it usually generates a slightly different response, or even a different choice of words, which can make all of the difference. This was the case here. Between the second and third questions we had a break in the taping. I told Mary what the next question would be and we began discussing it. She used an example that I really liked, and I told her to try to say it again when we were taping. But when it came to the question, she didn't quite get all of what I was looking for in it the second time. So I prompted her with the fourth question to get in what I was looking for. It worked, and we got not only some great video, but wonderful audio that could be used in the narration.

After we finished taping, we went into the booth to view the video. Mary seemed pleased with what she saw. I was ecstatic!

Last evening I hand wrote her a note thanking her for her time, her cooperation, and for putting up with the delays of our first filming attempt.

I also wrote a letter last night to Leo LaGrotte, of Milano Inn's Pasta To Go fame. He's one of the entrepreneurship grads and one of our best. We were unable to get a film of him when he visited our class on Tuesday. I asked him after class if he would be willing to let a crew and myself come down to Indy to film him in his office for the video. He said yes and gave me his card. But I didn't have a chance to explain the project to him, or really what we wanted. My letter gave him the basic details. I plan to call him the weekend of 2/8.

I'm really excited about filming him in his office. We have Mary in the studio, we plan to get one grad talking to the new venture class, and then Leo in his office. I like the change of settings and the ability to show off, in this case, what our grads have come to. Let's hope his office is pretty special.

Plans are in the makes to film Scott Morris, Estate Planning, talking to the new venture class next Tuesday (1/29). I hope Woody gets me a cameraman.

January 29, 1991

5:10 pm

Today I met Woody at 12:15. I was lucky enough to have Woody for my camera man again. I like working with him. And he's quiet, which helps when you're taping in a classroom situation.

We had another good taping session today. The class speaker, Scott Morris, is fairly interesting. But what we anticipated doing with the taping today is just the video, and combine it later with an audio track. Scott was perfect for this. He uses his hands a lot when he talks, and we have some good footage of him interacting with a class member. I suspect he will look good on tape since he was active and energetic.

I have in mind to combine a bit of today's footage with a voice-over of Mary Schroeder's comment about how those grads who come back to talk to current entrepreneurship students feel that they own the program in a way. They are dedicated because the program's continued success makes their degrees that much more valuable.

February 21, 1991

9:05 pm

This entire project is going much differently than I had anticipated. I could see the possibility of there being many things to be recorded or taped. Video is definitely a difficult medium to work with because one has to have action to make it interesting. I don't think coming up with a script will be as difficult as finding 10 or 15 minutes of good video. People writing business plans and doing consulting are two things: 1. Difficult to catch when something happens that would make good tape, and 2. Not always as good on tape as in real life.

For instance, today I managed to get Woody, Aaron, and myself down to Indy to tape Leo LaGrotte, a very successful grad of the entrepreneurship program. He's not the easiest person I've met to talk to. Unfortunately I'm afraid this may have come out in his video.

April 21, 1991

10:47 pm

Woody bailed me out again last week by attending a cocktail party where Dr. K. was speaking. I was supposed to go too, but I got sick around noon, and we were leaving at 2:30.

I got the script written last week. I think it will go well with the video. Woody got a "voice" man to do the narration for us. His name is Dmitri Sadorapolas, I think. We start tomorrow with the editing of the video we've got. I'm glad we're actually going to get this thing finished. A few weeks ago, when I had surgery, I wondered if it would ever be finished, and be GOOD.

RISKING IT ALL

The College of Business at Ball State University is the hub of activity for 33% of Ball State's 20,000 undergraduate students.

Ball State's College of Business is one of only 18% of America's schools that are accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business. Ball State's College of Business is accredited at both the graduate and undergraduate levels and offers students a wide range of degrees. Office administration, international business, and logistics are only a few of the options open to Ball State business students.

But recently one program in the department of management science has been attracting nationwide attention.

At Ball State in 1983 there was an idea. An idea that teaching business required fresh concepts and innovation. The College of Business at Ball State was looking for a niche, a way to distinguish itself. Dr. Donald Kuratko was seeking a college that was willing to take a risk. Dr. Kuratko had found himself at a crossroads. He could become a successful entrepreneur and create one venture. Or he could find a school with the initiative to let him develop an entrepreneurship program, and through that program's success and students, create innumerable ventures nationwide. Academics told Dr. Kuratko his program wouldn't

work. Ball State found Dr. Kuratko at the right time, seeking the right major, at the right type of school. Thus dawned a new age for Ball State.

The George Washington medal of honor was given to the Entrepreneurship program only four years after the program's inception. With the award, the Entrepreneurship program gained distinction in quality business education.

From the program's award in 1987 we go to a graduate of the 1987 Entrepreneurship class.

Leo LaGrotte, Jr. knew he wanted to major in entrepreneurship and have his own restaurant someday.

Leo's family own and operate the Milano Inn located in Indianapolis. But currently Leo is involved in other projects.

In 1988 the Entrepreneurship program gained national prominence with the Leavey award. This award is given to a program only once for quality curricula, professors, and merit.

In management science 346 students learn the meaning of the word entrepreneurship. They are taught that entrepreneurship combines creativity to build a vision from practically nothing.

To assist students in learning the true role of an entrepreneur, young entrepreneurs are brought in to speak to classes. The Entrepreneurship program also hosts the

Entrepreneurs forum yearly. This forum has sponsored entrepreneurs such as Joline Godfrey, CEO of Odysseum, Jean Thorn and John Hughes of Fannie Mae Candy, Dr. Harold Welsch of DePaul University, and Dr. Bob Brockhaus of St. Louis University.

As part of their graduation requirements, Entrepreneurship students participate in the Small Business Institute Consulting program. In this program students form into student consulting teams and are assigned a client. Throughout the course of the semester students work with their client to diagnose and solve actual problems that the client may have in their business.

In 1990 the Entrepreneurship program received the National Model Program Award for outstanding curricula, professors, and graduates. This award was the final verification that Ball State's entrepreneurship program was definitely the best in the nation. Over 100 schools were in competition for this award.

There is one course found in the Entrepreneurship program that sets it apart from all other entrepreneurship programs nationwide. This course is the key to the awards that the program has won, and it is the key to the success of the program's graduates. It is the capstone course of the Entrepreneurship program, and many professors from other universities said it couldn't be done.

This capstone course of the entrepreneurship major is the new venture creation class. In this one semester class

students prepare individual business plans. Students thoroughly research all aspects of the start-up of a business of their own. The business the student starts can be anything, a restaurant, an aircraft repair shop, even a brewery.

At the end of the semester the students present their plans to a panel of 24 reviewers. These reviewers are not Ball State faculty, but are management consultants, and financial investors. The evaluators give a grade of pass or fail, based upon whether or not they would finance the student's venture. The students must pass according to the panel in order to graduate.

As we have seen, Leo LaGrotte graduated from the program and went on to open his Pasta-to-Go chain.

Scott Morris is a 1987 grad who now heads LML Estate Management. Mary Schroeder, a 1988 entrepreneurship grad, landed her first job as director of the SBDC in Columbus, Indiana.

Students are given as much assistance as possible in preparing their plans. Any kind of help is allowed, including the option to hire professional help. Past grads of the program come back to Ball State to offer suggestions and encouragement.

Mary Schroeder explained that past graduates of the entrepreneurship program are dedicated to it because they are a part of the program's success. She states that graduates of the program feel like they own a part of it.

Even graduates of other Ball State business programs help those in the New Venture Course. Beth Petry, and account with Ernst and Young, and a Ball State grad, meets several times a year to help students with the financial planning of their business. Beth is also a member of the reviewing board.

Risking it All

April 28, 1991

3:17 pm

We're something like over 50% of the way through laying down the video track. Dmitri has made a voice tape for us, and we have the soundtrack recorded. I thought things would be pretty smooth through out this portion. But now I have to make an emergency trip home, expected to last until graduation day. I want to just give up on it all. I've got to get Woody tonight when he gets back from his trip home and try to set up a lot of video time early in the morning tomorrow. I just don't know if it can all get done.

I've learned numerous things about video filming, editing, and other such things. It really helps to be super-organized and efficient. It also helps to know what you want and yet be flexible about getting it. The final product is what counts, not the stuff you originally planned or went through to make it what it is. Gathering video to put into the project is like having a hundred puzzles mixed together on the table and picking out only the ones to fit into the picture that's in your mind. Putting together a script is like having the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle and not having the top of the box to show what the overall picture is supposed to be. But it all comes together in the end.

Special thanks goes to:

Dr. Don Kuratko, Dr. Joe Misiewicz, Dean Palomba, Jerry Cole, Dan Lutz, Mary Schroeder, Leo LaGrotte, Dr. Doug Naffziger, Aaron, Dmitri Sadaropolos, and Brian "Woody" Woodrum, without who it couldn't have been done.